

## Bush, Sharon, and Arafat:

### The Pursuit of Israeli-Palestinian Peace (Part IV)

by [Dennis Ross \(/experts/dennis-ross\)](#)

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#### ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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**M**artin Indyk proposes an ambitious, groundbreaking path. The other path described by David Makovsky and David Satterfield is a less ambitious one, based on an assumption that it is the only realistic option. I would differentiate between the "process" approach that you heard from the two Davids and what I would call the more "comprehensive" approach from Martin. Right now, the preoccupation is with Iraq. When we deal with Saddam Husayn and change the landscape, it may create a possibility for progress on the Israeli-Palestinian front.

There is already something happening among the Palestinians, and that is the reform movement. Here I would embrace the sentiment of the process approach, because the reform movement represents a historic change on the Palestinian side. It is historic in the sense that the Palestinians have historically embraced victimhood; they have approached victimhood not only as a condition, but as a strategy. When you are a victim, you are never responsible for anything; therefore, you never have to fix anything. Your problems are always someone else's responsibility. You never have to admit mistakes, because you never make mistakes. It is always someone else's fault, and you are "entitled." The reform movement represents an acknowledgment of Palestinian mistakes, on the one hand, and the need for Palestinian corrections on the other. That is a first step toward being able to reconcile with the Israelis -- not just rhetorically, but in practice.

That is the good news. The bad news is that the reformers have all the best intentions but lack the troops. Those who are not reformers -- who do not have good intentions -- have the troops. So the question is whether, through the process approach of the two Davids, it is possible to empower the reformers. The two Davids maintain that it is in fact possible. It all comes back to one word: security. There will be no reform if there is no security for the Israelis. There will be no reform if the Israelis remain in six of the eight cities of the West Bank. The Israelis will not get out of those cities if, as soon as they get out, bombs go off within Israel. The real equation is "security for freedom." That is the essence of it.

So, the key is whether you can produce security through the process approach. The administration is trying to create a basis for that approach through training, working with the Quartet, and getting the Egyptians and Jordanians to help. So far, we have not seen results. One critical question that must be posed -- whether in the process approach or

the comprehensive approach -- is under what circumstances the Palestinians will assume a much more fundamental responsibility. The key to real security for Israelis will be when the Palestinians are prepared to say that those who carry out suicide bombings are actually enemies of the Palestinian cause. Think about what it would mean for a Palestinian leader to stand up and say, "We are determined to live in peace. We have a cause and our aspirations must be addressed. But there is only one way to pursue those aspirations, and that is at the negotiating table. Anyone who challenges that, anyone who would use violence now, is an enemy of the Palestinian cause, and we will deal with him as an enemy." Today, such an unmistakable posture is almost unthinkable, even though, for the first time, we have on the Palestinian side a debate about the illegitimacy of violence.

The reform movement is historically significant, even if it cannot be translated into comprehensive reform right now, because it creates the basis for a different psychology, including a recognition that there must be a nonviolent means of pursuing a cause. We are not there yet, and the critical challenge is how to empower the Palestinian reformers. In the process approach, the emphasis is on gradually creating a structure of outside accountability to which Palestinians must respond. But that still does not necessarily get us to the point where a strategic decision is made on the Palestinian side.

Palestinian reformers will need to acknowledge two things if the process approach is to have any chance of succeeding. First, they will have to see that the United States will view their cause as illegitimate if suicide bombing continues. In other words, they must see that this is not about instruments; it is about the cause itself. Palestinian reformers have to be able to say, "Our way works, yours does not, and yours discredits us." Second, reform without a destination cannot be translated into action, so they need to be able to point to a picture of where things are headed, which will in turn empower them to openly challenge the viability of violence. That picture cannot be entirely vague because it will not be believable. This means that the U.S. administration should add more content to the vision, while the Israelis should demonstrate that, although violence is futile, there is a political pathway through which Palestinians can achieve their aspirations. Again, it comes back to a bet on the outcome. Will we have security or not?

Martin's approach is based on an assumption that nothing can work unless you do something dramatically different -- something that changes the ground rules, that alters the logic of the equation, and that is basically built on the assumption that the incremental approach cannot work. The comprehensive approach suggests that the way to convince the reformers and everyone else that they have something to lose is by both demonstrating what they have to lose in a more practical way and by taking over responsibility from them.

The critical question for Martin is whether his approach makes it more likely or less likely that Palestinians will make a decision and be responsible for it. This shift in psychology, this assumption of responsibility, is to my mind the key to any peace. Is a trusteeship likely to perpetuate the notion that it is always up to someone else to solve Palestinian problems? As long as that is the case, who will stand up and say that those who carry out suicide bombings are enemies of the Palestinian cause? I would say that a prerequisite for Martin's approach is getting Palestinians to make this statement, because if they do not, it will only be a matter of time before we will be seen as the new occupiers.

Martin also spoke of a 52 percent formula. Yet, such a formula could easily be interpreted by the Palestinians as a final offer, even if we say it is provisional and only for three years. If that is the case, and if there is still no attempt to delegitimize those who would carry out suicide acts, then we will become the targets. Where does that lead me in terms of what can be done?

Elsewhere in these proceedings, Uzi Dayan laid out another alternative: the notion of unilateral separation or unilateral disengagement. Of course, negotiations are the most desirable approach, but there could be a way to go through with unilateral disengagement and still allow a provision for negotiating a different outcome in the future.

Keep in mind the overarching issue that we have to address. The reality is that, given the demographics in Israel, there will be partition at some point. The only question is how that partition will come about. Will it come about through negotiations? Through trusteeship? Through separation? That is the heart of the issue we are addressing here today.

Read remarks by the other participants on this panel: [Martin Indyk, \(templateC07.php?CID=126\)](#) [David Makovsky, \(templateC07.php?CID=129\)](#) and [David Satterfield \(templateC07.php?CID=130\)](#) ❖

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